Democracy, communication and language in Europe's transnational political space

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Abstract

The external communication of the European Union (EU) suffers from the fact that the flow of information from the Europe of institutions to the Europe of citizens has until now had little success in inspiring popular political participation. This problem can be related to the politics of language in the EU. The paper begins with a discussion of two prominent views of the European problematic of language and the public sphere. The essential interconnections between public political communication and the issue of language in the EU are set forth in contrast with these positions. The paper then turns to the main parameters of an EU language policy directed to the external sphere of communication. A possible strategy for shaping the relation between multilingualism and a transnational public sphere in Europe is sketched out in the final sections.

Kurzzusammenfassung

Die Europäische Union (EU) hat im Bereich der öffentlichen Darstellung ihrer Politik Defizite: Bisher hat der Informationsfluss vom Europa der Institutionen zum Europa der Bürger nicht nennenswert dazu beigetragen, politische Partizipation im transnationalen Maßstab anzuregen. Das Problem verweist auf die Herausforderungen europäischer Sprachpolitik. Der Beitrag beginnt mit einer Diskussion von zwei prominenten Sichtweisen des Verhältnisses von Sprache und Öffentlichkeit in Europa. Wesentliche Verbindungen zwischen Sprachenfrage und den Strukturen öffentlicher Kommunikation in der EU werden im Kontrast zu diesen Positionen herausgearbeitet. Im Anschluss daran werden die Hauptparameter der auf die Sphäre der externen Kommunikation gerichteten Sprachpolitik der EU kritisch betrachtet. Der Schlussteil des Beitrags skizziert eine mögliche Strategie zum Umgang mit der Sprachenvielfalt in einer transnationalen europäischen Öffentlichkeit.

Peter A. Kraus

Democracy, Communication and Language in Europe's Transnational Political Space

The contentiousness of language policy within European institutions is closely bound up with the political character of the European Union (EU). Processes of communication within the Union have such a high practical and symbolic profile because they make an essential contribution to the progressive constitution of a political community. The EU possesses extensive decision-making authority; European law has direct effect for all citizens of member states; and European politics is conducted in a highly differentiated complex of institutions with an independent executive, legislative and judiciary. Hence the EU explodes the framework of a traditional international organization. It is not only since the introduction of the Euro that its influence on the everyday lives of Europeans has become virtually ubiquitous. It extends to a whole range of regulatory domains. In fact, there is scarcely a single policy field in the member states today in which the community dimension is completely insignificant (Schmitter 1996: 125). In areas such as agriculture and trade it has long since become the dominant factor.

The considerable (and growing) importance of political processes in the institutions of the European Union for the lives of its citizens cannot be doubted. But how do things stand with the communicative mediation of EU politics? Here there are evidently massive deficits. A constant chorus of complaints connects the political indifference of the subjects of European governance towards the outcomes of this very governance with the lack of information on EU affairs and the lack of transparency of decision-making processes in Brussels. The EU is constantly confronted with the problem that a low level of public awareness of its political tasks and activities finds expression in mistrust and refusal of loyalty.

Evidently, the external communication of the EU as a whole suffers from the fact that the flow of information from the Europe of institutions to the Europe of citizens has until now had little success in inspiring popular political participation. To what extent can this problem be related to the politics of language? Here the connection between institutional will-formation and the communicative substructure, which is characteristic of a developing 'European civil society', is crucial. How does the language question impact on the factors which influence the emergence of a political public sphere in Europe? In this context, the category of the public sphere must be understood in a substantive normative sense as the

ensemble of intermediary structures of opinion- and will-formation which confer legitimacy on a political order by exposing decision-making processes to the critical examination and judgment of the citizens (Habermas 1990). As such, the public sphere is a key structural element of politics in democratic constitutional states. Accordingly, the language issue points directly back to the debate over the European constitution.

In this paper I will first discuss two prominent views of the European problematic of language and the public sphere. In contrast with these positions, I will set forth what I regard as the essential interconnections between questions of language and public political communication in the EU. I will then turn to the main parameters of an EU language policy directed to the external sphere of communication. Finally, I will sketch a possible strategy for shaping the relation between multilingualism and a transnational public sphere in Europe.

Constitution, Publicity, Language

With the constitutional debate which followed the Maastricht Treaty, the problem of how a political community of communication could be founded on the basis of a multiplicity of languages also became the focus of increased attention in European discussions. The prominent constitutional theorist Dieter Grimm unquestionably played a pioneering role. Significantly, Grimm draws a direct connection between his thesis that the EU lacks a genuine basis of democratic legitimation and the issue of language. In Grimm's own words:

> 'The importance of the language factor for the possibility of European democracy is often underestimated, partly because a democracy concept confined to the area of organised opinion-formation predominates,…partly because of a failure to perceive the dependency of democracy on communication opportunity. Pointing to multilingual states like Switzerland, Belgium or Finland…does not refute this. [A] country like Switzerland had formed a national identity well before constitutionalisation and relates its multilingual political discourse to it …
> By contrast, the absence of a European communication system, due chiefly to language diversity, has the consequence that for the foreseeable future there will neither be a European public nor a European political discourse. The European level of politics lacks a matching public (Grimm 1995: 295-6).'

From the perspective adopted by Grimm, the fact that the citizens of the EU are not in a position to arrive at discursive agreements regarding their political concerns lends the European democratic deficit a structural character. Grimm (1995: 299) concludes that for the present the possibility of democracy clearly remains tied to the political framework of the nation-state.

The communication-theoretical aspect of Grimm's plea for democracy in the nation-state provoked Jürgen Habermas into a response. Habermas (1995: 306) is not at all inclined to

abandon a normatively demanding concept of the public sphere in light of the process of transnational integration and argues that there cannot be a democratic European federal state

> 'unless a European-wide, integrated public sphere develops in the ambit of a common political culture: a civil society with interest associations; non-governmental organisations; citizens' movements, etc., and naturally a party system appropriate to a European arena. In short, this entails public communication that transcends the boundaries of the until now limited national public spheres.'

In opposition to Grimm, however, Habermas understands the creation of a public sphere in the EU as an integrative aim to be promoted by means of the appropriate political institutions. He addresses the language question only in passing by casually describing English as the 'second first language' (Habermas 1995: 307) of Europeans.

Habermas takes up the issue of language again in a subsequent intervention in the European constitutional debate, where he treats it in a more differentiated fashion, but without modifying the general position he developed in response to Grimm. He reaffirms that outstanding political function of the infrastructure of the public sphere in a democracy 'is to turn relevant societal problems into topics of concern, and to allow the general public to relate, at the same time, to the same topics, by taking an affirmative or negative stand on news and opinions' (Habermas 2001a: 218). Habermas recognizes that no such arenas of public will-formation exist at the transnational level. Hence he proposes that national public spheres should form networks while preserving intact their internal circuits of communication. But this willingness to respect the autonomy of linguistically distinct forums of political communication is once again coupled more or less abruptly with the hope that 'English as a second 'first' language' (ibid.: 19) will prevail as the normal medium of communication in the EU.

Grimm correlates language primarily with the identity of nation-states, conflating the political communication community and the national linguistic community. By contrast, Habermas for cosmopolitan reasons loosens the ties that bind language to a democratic community integrated via processes of public communication. His idea is that communicative bonds which transcend particular cultural and linguistic memberships must develop in the European transnational domain. Grimm tends to align language, as the mode of expression of political culture, exclusively with the communicative space of a national collectivity; thus the nation-state framework creates the preconditions for a harmonious coexistence of the political-instrumental and the political-expressive dimensions of language. For his part, Habermas can scarcely avoid downplaying for the most part the expressive binding power of linguistic identities in favour of the instrumental requirements of political communication in the transnational domain.

What is striking is that both thinkers base relatively strong political theses on not altogether unproblematic empirical premises. We can detect an interesting inconsistency in the argument in the passage from Grimm cited above. For the constitutional theorist, the experience of multilingual democracies such as Switzerland, Belgium and Finland cannot be sensibly projected onto the EU, apart from anything else because of the quantitatively different dimensions of language pluralism at the level of the Union. Grimm further specifies that, in Switzerland, the formation of a superordinate collective identity historically preceded the process of constitutionalisation. But one might ask how such an identity could have arisen and been reproduced when one of its necessary presuppositions, on which he insists in the case of the EU, – namely, a shared language – was lacking. Grimm uses an analytical prism which leaves him with no choice but to make a political equivalence between linguistic community, nation-state and the public sphere.[1] The wide spectrum of variations of linguistic policy constellations in European democracies (Kraus 2000) thereby inevitably receives short shrift.

Habermas, by contrast, tends to underestimate the sociological and normative implications of language pluralism for the creation of a transnational space of communication. 'English as a second language' is a postulate far removed from the everyday lives of large sections of the European population, as we shall see. In addition, it is a *political* postulate and should be recognized as such. Habermas takes his orientation from the normative desideratum of a European public sphere. But this fails to take account of the fact that the integration of language communities is shaped by processes of political domination (Bourdieu 1991). Accordingly, the introduction of a second first language to serve European citizens as a shared standard of communication must respect constitutionally legitimated regulatory criteria. The fact that putting the issue of language on the political agenda creates the potential for conflict should not be overlooked in analyzing possible forms of organization of a transnational public sphere.

In assessing the implications of linguistic and cultural diversity, each author emphasizes a specific dimension of the problem of communication and publicity in the EU. Grimm gives the impression that language, as a politically relevant pattern of cultural identity, is almost hermetically sealed into the nation-state. But he thereby underestimates the capacity of communication communities to diversify internally and open themselves up externally. For normative reasons Habermas tends to dissolve cultural differences in the transnational

1 In fact, the extent to which Switzerland, as a democratically constituted federation of states, possesses the stable national foundations Grimm ascribes to it is a matter of controversy. The Swiss author Adolf Muschg (1998), for example, sees the political development of his country in a different light: 'Switzerland is not a nation and it does not have to become one; it is at once much less and much more: a civic alliance of different peoples, formed to safeguard their differences within a framework defined by human rights and human dignity'.

public domain, so that he has to ignore the potentials for communicative closure in multilingual contexts of political interaction.

Grimm has the merit that, with his scepticism concerning the relation between language diversity and publicity in the EU, he drew attention to something which had been largely neglected in discussions concerning European democracy. Assessments of the prospects for a democratization of the Union in political science, in particular, often focus on the system of institutions in the narrow sense, so that insufficient attention is paid to the socio-political infrastructure of democracy. Habermas takes up the questions posed by Grimm from a somewhat different, normative point of view, thereby bringing important new perspectives to bear on the controversy concerning the prospects of democracy in the EU. Generally speaking, the positions taken by other authors who at least broach the language question in analyzing political communication structures in the EU overlap to a greater or lesser extent with the conclusions drawn by Grimm and Habermas.[2] As a consequence, the discussion does only partial justice to the complexity of the issue of linguistic diversity for European politics. The normative challenges of language pluralism for the constitution of an overarching space of political communication can scarcely be met by a defensive posture inspired by the model of the homogeneous nation-state. However, the offensive strategy – typically involving embracing the English language – of attempting to create a political public sphere without acknowledging the politically controversial character of developing a corresponding communicative infrastructure can provide at best weak impulses for the formation of a transnational political culture which both bridges and respects the diversity of linguistic identities.

Political Communication in Multilingual Contexts

The problems of the political public sphere and of language should not be viewed as in principle congruent. However, they certainly do overlap. The communicability of political discourses remains inextricably bound up with the medium of language. Thus, before political communication can even take place, the linguistic channels along which it is supposed to flow must first be clarified. This may seem a trivial matter, but in a context of linguistic differentiation its implications are by no means trivial. For the decision over how to communicate is itself already a political decision.

2 As regards the requirement to ground a common political space in a shared linguistic identity, Greven (2000), Kielmansegg (1996), Siedentop (2000) and Van Parijs (2004), for example, defend a similar conception to Grimm. By contrast, Eder (2004), Eriksen/Fossum (2000) and Kaelble (2001) tend towards the position of Habermas, though with different emphases.

How have nation-state democracies in Western Europe dealt with the paradox? At one end of the spectrum is the French version of the republican model. It provides the paradigmatic example of the deliberate creation of a uniform space of political communication 'from above', through the state and its institutions. From the end of the eighteenth century in France, the creation of a public sphere facilitating smooth interactions between political and civil society was almost synonymous with linguistic homogenization. The francophone political pathos which still resonates today is fuelled by the conviction that the enlightened revolutionary heritage of 1789 embodied by the French language transcends all socio-cultural particularism. However, at the other end of the spectrum, the multilingual democracies of Belgium, Finland and Switzerland represent alternatives to the Jacobin model of integration (Kraus 2004). In these cases, it is often overlooked that the possibilities of broad-based linguistic communication within the population remained severely restricted even after democratization. In a survey conducted in Switzerland in 1972, around 40% of German Swiss and 50% of the Romands (i.e. Francophones) stated that they were fluent only in their own language. For Belgium there exist census data until 1947.[3] According to the last calculation, the proportion of individuals who were bilingual, i.e. who were capable of communicating both in Dutch and in French, was just 16% nationally. Even in Finland, where the territorial language boundaries are much more blurred than in Switzerland or in Belgium, data for the year 1950 show that official bilingualism was not equivalent to societal bilingualism. The number of those who regarded themselves as bilingual amounted to 8% among Finnish-speakers and 46% among Swedish-speakers.[4]

Such data do not provide an adequate basis for constructing a general model of multilingual political publics. Nevertheless, they can be interpreted as indicators that in multilingual societies democratic integration has been achieved under the banner of mutual recognition of linguistically defined group identities. The policies pursued have indeed been marked by regular conflicts; but in the cases examined, they have lead to a sustainable basis for coexistence among political equals who respect each others' differences.[5] In addition, the spaces of political communication in the countries mentioned reflect in varying degrees patterns of linguistic diversity. For example, the existence of different language communities finds expression in the publicly controlled media as well as at the level of political institutions. In this respect, polyglot individuals play an important role in mediating discursively between the communities in the formation of opinions and in the proc-

3 In later censuses a deliberate decision was taken not to made statistical determinations of membership in language groups in order to avoid political controversies (cf. McRae 1986: 35)

4 The details have be drawn from the meticulous studies of multilingual democracies by McRae; see McRae 1983: 67-68; 1986: 39-40; 1997: 99-100.

5 For an evaluation of the political significance of multilingualism in Switzerland from the perspective of political philosophy, see Holenstein 1988; on Belgium see Van Parijs 2000a. For a comparison with the normatively interesting case of Canada, see Kymlicka 1998 and Taylor 1994.

esses of reaching political decisions. As it happens, rudimentary attempts to foster a multilingual repertoire in public contexts of communication were also discernable in the later period of the Habsburg Empire, whose language situation easily outstripped the problems of Belgium or Switzerland in degree of complexity (Goebl 1997).

Let us now turn to the institutional context of the European Union in an attempt to throw some empirical light on the problems of language diversity and the public sphere in an emerging transnational polity. The European Parliament must be regarded as the main forum for the public presentation of relevant positions on current issues in EU politics. But the level of awareness of the activities and deliberations of the Strasburg Parliament is clearly well below the level of attention accorded to the activities of parliaments in the member states. The weariness with politics which seems to have infected so many European democracies becomes even more acute when it comes to the formation of opinions at the supranational level. It would certainly be a mistake to make the Parliament the scapegoat for the general lack of interest in European issues. Nor do I want to suggest that parliamentary culture in the political systems of the members states is in rude good health by comparison with Strasburg.[6] However, even from the point of view of an unreconstructed political realism, the prospect presented by plenary sessions of the European Parliament is generally a rather sobering one. This is especially true for the functions of articulating and disseminating political options which parliaments are supposed to perform in liberal democracies (von Beyme 1999).

The contribution of the European Parliament to making the basic contents of European decision-making public remains modest. The activities of parliamentarians lack transparency and broader political impact. The Strasburg Parliament is certainly not a site of intense and heated political debates. When important votes are taken, the European People's Party and the Social Democrats unite in an informal coalition in the chamber (Hix 1999: 79-82). Preliminary deliberations leading to decisions take place within the Union-typical institutional framework of the comitology,[7] which includes representatives from the assembly but nevertheless does not accord the Parliament any special status compared with other involved European bodies.

It is obvious that the weak profile of the European Parliament as a public forum for developing a transnational political discourse is also connected with the problem of language barriers. It is not easy to imagine how a lively political debate could be conducted in eleven (or more) languages. As a consequence, the contributions of parliamentarians in the

6 For a disillusioned analysis of the operation of contemporary parliamentary democracy, see, for example, Bobbio 1988 and Zolo 1992.

7 'Comitology' designates a complex system of committees in which national experts defend positions on measures planned by the commission; on the modalities of will-formation in the comitology, see Joerges and Neyer 1998 and Joerges and Everson 2000.

plenary sessions are restricted to brief statements on issues delivered as monologues. Podium times are severely limited because of the need to coordinate sittings with the interpretation services. The effect is like that of a rigidly conducted ritual in which the unavoidable reliance on the machinery of translation leaves little room for the art of political rhetoric.

In fact, the real work of the delegates does not take place in the plenary sessions but in the meetings of the numerous committees and working groups which shape the parliamentary decision-making process. Here, a multilingualism based on the twin pillars of English and French becomes the de facto communication regime. Delegates who do not have sufficient knowledge of at least one of these two languages depend on the aid of colleagues who possess the requisite competence (Wright 2000: 169). Their scope for communication in informal contexts is always severely restricted. Parliamentarians' levels of competence in foreign languages have not yet been investigated in a comprehensive and reliable manner. The Directorate-General for Research of the Parliament planned to conduct an internal study on this issue for statistical purposes after the 1994 elections. But the project was abandoned because it roused the ire of many delegates (Bueno 1999: 312-313). This occurrence is further proof of the explosiveness of the language question. It is extremely doubtful whether parliamentarians who do not master the relevant repertoire in the de facto working languages to some extent are in a position to perform their functions satisfactorily. A delegate who speaks only her native language – assuming her native language is neither English nor French – is in effect condemned to silence in many areas of activity, a silence which is ultimately synonymous with political insignificance. Knowledge of foreign languages is an important criterion in hiring officials and employees of the Commission. However, to make it a selection criterion for the election of political representatives would create major problems from a normative point of view. It is no coincidence that the European Parliament has consistently presented itself as a bastion of integral multilingualism.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the language problem is of great importance not just for the representation of publicity in the European Parliament but also for its production. For a majority of delegates, influencing the will-formation process presupposes competence in foreign languages. But the implications of factual differences in the status of official languages and the corresponding inequality of opportunities for political communication remain a taboo issue even for the Parliament itself. The circle between language and the political public sphere here closes once again. The communicative anomalies of the parliamentary public sphere at the European level are reflected not least in the fact that the Strasbourg institution does not play the classical role of a representative body as a locus of conflicts between government and opposition. The modus operandi of the Parliament is essentially tailored to a complementary (and still, to a considerable extent, subordinate) status vis-à-vis the other European legislative authority, the Council. Political discussion

takes place within a network of issue-specific working committees which bring together members of different parliamentary groups (Neunreither 1998: 432-434). This system may indeed foster important political interactions and initiatives on specific issues; but it does not create the impression that the European Parliament is an agora of transnational politics.

The problem of political communication at the level of the European Parliament is just the tip of the iceberg. It shows that the formation of a discursively integrated public sphere among political elites is a slow process. The creation of a common public space in which institutional decision-making processes are embedded seems to be even more difficult in the domain of transnational mass communication. In the EU, the divisions within the sphere of political communication founded on the infrastructure of the mass media continue to reflect the borders which separate nation-states and language communities. On the one hand, there have been initiatives by the EC/EU to develop a 'European audiovisual space' by promoting cross-border film and television productions. However, they were aimed basically at intercultural dialogue and the preservation of cultural heritage. By contrast, the topic of 'information society', which has recently been accorded a prominent position on the agenda of the Commission, is particularly concerned with laying down uniform European standards for implementing telecommunication systems and new information technologies. Questions of political communication in a narrower sense were expressly excluded in both instances (Schlesinger/Kevin 2000: 221). Moreover, independently of the activities of the EU, private media concerns have until now produced only weak initiatives towards the formation of a European media system.

Let us first consider the print media. There is no question that the readership of European newspapers remains overwhelmingly regional and national. The high-circulation, so-called 'great European dailies', such as *Le Monde*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* or *El País*, are in the first instance press organs whose editorial policy reflects the political and cultural priorities of the countries in which they appear. The only daily newspaper that can claim to reach a genuinely European public is the *Financial Times Europe*. The readership of this English-language paper is mainly comprised of members of political and, in particular, economic elites. Its reporting is also followed with great interest in Brussels. The European edition of the *Financial Times* (not to be confused with national editions such as the *Financial Times Deutschland*) is reputed to be particularly close to the Commission. In the opinion of a contributor to the *Financial Times*, its addressees belong to a class with both a European and a global outlook, which he describes as 'people with money who don't want to lose it or want to have even more of it'. The chief editor of the European edition describes the paper as 'neoliberal, but with a social conscience'.[8] The

8 Quotes from an article on the *Financial Times Europe* in *Die Zeit* 29/2001 ('Mächtig, trocken, rosa' ['Powerful, Dry, Pink']).

economic incentives favouring the introduction of a European daily newspaper which deviates from a business newspaper format are not generally rated as very strong. Here too, the multiplicity of languages remains one of the main factors hindering the emergence of a Europe-wide public (Gerhards 2000: 291).

As regards the audiovisual media, until now the development has been, if anything, even more painfully slow than in the case of the print media. Initiatives to establish a European television channel have failed. Pilot projects such as Eurikon or Europa TV, which were started in the 1980s, were of short duration (Meckel 1994). In the audiovisual media sector, the problem of the plurality of languages is also regarded as a basic structural hurdle to the emergence of European channels (Gerhards 1993: 101-102). Significantly, news channels such as CNN or BBC World which broadcast in the lingua franca English have a 'global' rather than a European orientation (with an emphasis on the USA in the case of CNN, and on the Commonwealth countries in the case of BBC World). Other lingua franca programmes which can be received in Europe, such as the music channel MTV, use the linguistic medium relatively sparingly. By contrast, the news channel Euronews has a policy of broadcasting a single core repertory in several languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Arabic). The multilingual channel has for the present found very limited acceptance with the public, though it is regarded by media experts as having good growth potential (Schlesinger/Kevin 2000: 227).

The picture offered by the traditional print and audiovisual media does not change substantially when we look at the realm of new information technology. The European Commission has invested considerable efforts in widening the communicative scope of Europe's political space through the Internet. At the present stage, it would be premature to assess the real effect of the Internet in contribution to the rise of large-scale transnational political communities in the EU. However, the evidence we have at hands thus far seems to indicate that, both inside and outside the domain of new information technologies, the sphere of European publics is basically a restricted communicative space dominated by elites. The Internet may well be fostering the emergence and spread of new patterns of political membership. The anti-globalization movement is invariably offered as an example of such a trend. Yet, as regards the European situation, in the first place it is likely that the ambivalence characteristic of processes of public communication in the Internet already discernable at the national level will, if anything, increase in the transnational domain. An undoubtedly positive trend is the decentralisation of expertise and the construction of cross-border issue-specific networks. On the negative side, by contrast, are tendencies towards a progressive fragmentation of the public, with the associated decrease in interest in relating political discourse to the 'common good'. In addition, there is an imminent danger that the top-heaviness of modern government (which is, after all, government by elites)

will continue to increase if far-reaching institutional measures are not taken to construct a framework for the public use of information technologies that can satisfy democratic standards of legitimacy.[9]

All in all, the main problem we encounter when considering the structure of media-generated publics in the EU is, in essence, that the communicative exchange between the European political stage and the European public is fragmentary on account of the structure of the media landscape. Thus far there have been only weak initiatives towards developing the requisite media infrastructure for a transnational communication community. The EU does not yet satisfy the standards of an interculturally networked space of political communication which fulfils the minimum requirements of a critical public sphere (Glotz 1995). If, in contrast with someone like Grimm, the problem of publicity and communication in Europe is not seen from the very beginning as a major hindrance to further political integration, then two general argumentative strategies can be deployed. The first appeals to alternative forms of publicity in the transnational domain, the second to a possible Europeanisation of national public spheres.

On the first approach, issue-specific public spheres formed by experts and interest groups take the place of an overarching public sphere integrated communicatively through the connection between politics and media (Eder 2000). Such partial public spheres develop in the context of decision-making processes in which the EU-typical procedural rules of comitology play a decisive role. In areas such as BSE or migration, for example, they create the preconditions for the emergence of transnational resonance structures for political debate. Of course, this tells us nothing about how communication unfolds within these resonance structures. Moreover, as a general rule it will prove to be very difficult to specify systematic and normatively robust criteria for where to draw the line between deliberative expert public spheres and closed arenas of elite decision-making. Let us again examine the segment of the public represented by the *Financial Times Europe*. The portrait painted of it refers, among other things, to how 'a small group of influential and educated people' are playing a pioneering role in the construction of a common European public sphere. But, from a normative point of view, one might have doubts about a perspective for which an elite of the happy few, who 'today spend their evening in Barcelona, tomorrow in Berlin and next week in Stockholm', provides the standards of a transnational political discourse which apparently can get along fine without any link to a democratic general public.[10]

The second approach presents the Europeanisation of national public spheres as a viable option for dealing with the problem of public communication on a European scale (Ernst

9 On transnational communication, the Internet and political integration in Europe see Cederman/Kraus 2005.

10 Quotes from *Die Zeit*, 29/2001 ('Mächtig, trocken, rosa').

1998, Gerhards 1993). What is envisaged is more intensive attention to European issues within national media systems informed by a perspective which draws connections between national and European political dimensions. A certain scepticism is also appropriate in assessing this approach, because, in the final analysis, the problem of a European public is not really addressed by falling back on communication within the nation-states. The overarching context which relates these different public spheres to each other still has to be discursively produced if there is to be something more than a mere juxtaposition of Europeanised public spheres. One of the main concerns of free public communication in pluralistic democracies is to facilitate at least a provisional determination of the common good.[11] Comparable processes of working out a conception of a European common good are scarcely conceivable in the absence of a shared framework of political communication.

Ultimately, we know far too little about the basis and the rules of political communication in multilingual democracies. In view of the situation in the EU, it would be helpful if we could draw on empirically well-documented models which illuminate the *micro*structures of publicity under conditions of cultural and linguistic differentiation. In considering discussions of publicity in the social sciences, we typically encounter a problem that is characteristic for treatments of the relation between communication and politics in democratic theory in general: language is treated as an exogenous factor in the political process. However, the clarification of the conditions of communicative understanding is often itself already a political issue. Even under conditions of cultural heterogeneity, a democratic public sphere must be able to produce a framework for political cohesion by determining a conception of the common good, however precarious and provisional such a conception may prove to be. We may assume that in multilingual democracies this takes place through a horizontal nesting of publics in which both political and civil society actors relate their respective concerns to each other. Intercultural mediation processes – 'translations' in quite a literal sense – are clearly highly relevant in this connection.

In view of the tendencies which can be observed in the domain of transnational communication, there is a danger that in the EU a vertical shift (from bottom to top) of publicity will take the place of horizontal exchange. This danger implies that experts and elites will become isolated and seal off whole areas of decision-making into specialized forums from which the majority of citizens are excluded. The persistence of such a situation would seriously undermine the normative force of the project of integration in the medium term and set the project itself on shaky foundations. For, in the final analysis, politics, like language, has an expressive as well as an instrumental dimension. The integrating power of a political order ultimately depends on the fact that political events unfolding on the 'public stage' are made comprehensible for a broad community of citizens by being presented in a sym-

11 On this see the position set forth by Häberle (2000: 10-12).

bolic-dramatic form (Geertz 1980). But without an encompassing communicative context, this integrative force remains ineffectual.

Europe's Linguistic Landscape and the External Language Policy of the EU

How should we assess the linguistic foundations of transnational communication in Europe? The question concerns how knowledge of languages, and, in particular, of foreign languages, is distributed in the EU. As regards the relation of individuals in member states to their respective official languages, it is generally assumed that all individuals who have completed the obligatory period of schooling have acquired the minimum linguistic competence required for the autonomous exercise of their civil rights. If we consider the linguistic prerequisites for the unhindered exercise of the right to freedom of information and communication, this is by no means a trivial assumption. Thus, in officially multilingual contexts, the basic principle holds that membership in one of the recognized language groups should not entail any political disadvantages. In other words, civil rights speak the mother tongue. In many cases, this linking of civil rights with language follows the principle of territoriality. Immigrants who want to become citizens of the host country are typically expected to acquire a new 'political native language'.[12] We thereby assume that citizens are able to communicate in the national official language or in one of the national official languages.

The situation is more complicated in the European communicative space. Granted, the equal status of the official languages also remains an authoritative guideline in the context of EU citizenship. Nevertheless, as we saw in the case of the members of the European Parliament, transnational political communication on the basis of eleven (or more) official languages of equal status is a chimera. For the majority of participants, transnational communication consistently means communicating in a foreign language. But knowledge of foreign languages cannot be as straightforwardly assumed as the mastery of an official language by citizens, as is shown by the available data from which we can draw conclusions concerning the competence of EU citizens in foreign languages.

In 2000 the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission for the first time issued a special Eurobarometer Report on 'Europeans and Languages'. A total of 16,000 citizens from the (at that point still) fifteen EU member states were inter-

12 The emphasis new legislation on the integration of immigrants in countries such as Germany or the Netherlands places on language acquisition makes this point evident; cf. Maas et al. 2004 for the German case.

viewed, the main focus being the acquisition and knowledge of foreign languages.[13] According to the report, 53% of the respondents claim to be fluent in a language other than their mother tongue; 26% say that they are fluent in two foreign languages. By far the most widespread foreign language is, as expected, English, which 41% have learnt as a first, second or third foreign language. Apart from English, French and German achieve levels in double digits, with 19% and 10%, respectively.[14] English is the most frequently spoken first foreign language with 32.6%, followed by French with 9.5%. The strongholds of English knowledge are the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands; French is comparably strong as a second language mainly in Luxemburg, Belgium, Italy and Portugal. A break-down of lack of knowledge of foreign languages according to member country is not provided by the Eurobarometer study. But from other Eurobarometer reports covering approximately the same period, one can infer that the United Kingdom exhibits the highest levels in this regard; here a mere 25% of citizens questioned claim that they can speak another language well enough to be able to hold a conversation in it.[15]

The results of such surveys must certainly be very carefully qualified because they do not reflect an objective evaluation by third parties, but only express individuals' subjective self-assessments of their level of knowledge of foreign languages. Moreover, such self-evaluations are apparently culturally filtered. For example, the factors governing English instruction in schools in Sweden and Denmark are quite similar. Yet in Sweden only 0.1% of interviewees claim that their level of English is 'very good'; the level 'good', by contrast, is achieved by a Europe-leading level of 88.4%. In Denmark, by contrast, the proportion of 'very good' speakers is 36.7% and of 'good' speakers 34.9%.[16] In addition, we must keep in mind that the data on the prevalence of knowledge of foreign languages need to be supplemented by an assessment of the functional scope of this knowledge. 41% of EU citizens claim to have knowledge of English. Yet just 14% claim that their level of English is 'very good'. However, only such a level means that a person can successfully employ the foreign language in all ordinary situations, for example, that she is able to understand the contents of a newspaper completely or to write a formal letter.[17] Basically, a realistic assessment of knowledge of foreign languages would require conducting Europe-

13 Direction Générale de l'Éducation et de la Culture de la Commission Européenne. Unité 'Centre pour le citoyen – Analyse de l'opinion publique', 2001: 'Les Européens et les langues' (Eurobaromètre 54 spécial). The complete report exists only in French. There is a summary of the main results in English: Special Eurobarometer 'Europeans and Languages', Executive Summary.

14 Spanish stands at 7%, Italian at 3%.

15 According to Eurobarometer 52, the proportion is 19%, whereas Eurobarometer 55 sets the figure at 27%; cf. European Commission 2000 and European Commission 2001.

16 Cf. Eurobarometer Report 'Les Européens et les langues' (2001).

17 See the Eurobarometer Report 'Les Européens et les langues' (2001) for a break-down of knowledge of foreign languages according to levels of competence. The definitions of the three levels of knowledge of languages (very good, good and elementary) appear in the appendix to the report.

wide standardised language tests. Although the figures presented coincide more or less with other tentative findings,[18] they scarcely offer more than a very rough approximation of the actual level of knowledge of foreign languages in the EU.

For a better assessment of the survey results, it makes sense to contrast them with data on instruction in foreign languages in European schools. At levels I and II of general secondary education, English is clearly the dominant foreign language; in Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Austria, Sweden and Spain the proportion of students who receive some English instruction is between 90 and 100%. Only in Dutch-speaking Belgium and in Luxemburg does French as a foreign language achieve comparably high levels. Also interesting in this regard is an examination of the situation in new member countries and candidate countries in Eastern Europe. Here the leading role of English is less pronounced than in Western Europe. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, German and English are equally prevalent as the most frequently taught foreign languages with totals of around 50%. French, by contrast, plays a subordinate role among the group of Eastern European new member and candidate countries, with the exception of Romania, where it features as the principal foreign language even ahead of English.[19] On average, at secondary school levels I and II across the EU, the Luxemburgers learn the most foreign languages with 2.9. The Finnish reach 2.4, the French 1.7 languages; the Germans with a figure of 1.2 rank in the bottom third, just ahead of the Spanish and the Italians (with 1.1 each).[20]

In sum, data such as these leave no room for doubt concerning the leading position of English as a foreign language in Europe. Nevertheless, the picture is more nuanced than this would suggest. The actual potential of English as a lingua franca is considerably diminished for the present by the fact that barely half (46.5%) of the 41% of EU citizens who claim to have knowledge of English as a foreign language describe their ability as ‘very good’ or ‘good’. To put it bluntly, English may be a reliable medium for asking directions for many Europeans when they are abroad; but that does not make it the linguistic cement of a transnational political community. Moreover, knowledge of English is not uniformly distributed throughout the European continent. In the Scandinavian countries, the German-speaking area and the Netherlands, competence in English as a foreign language is on average higher than in other parts of the EU. In spite of the uncontested dominance of English, French and even German as foreign languages can claim some regional bastions. Finally, it is generally true that competence in foreign languages is an indicator of social

18 Cf., for example, the data presented by de Swaan (1993: 151-166).
19 All figures are for the school year 1996/97 (Eurydice 2001: 96-99).
20 Figures for the school year 1995/96 or, in the case of Luxemburg, the school year 1994-95, from the iwd-Informationsdienst of the Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft 24, June 15, 2001, ‘Deutsche Schulen wenig polyglott’ (German schools not very polyglot).

status throughout the EU. The higher a person's level of education, the more likely she is to speak one or more foreign languages.[21] If one wanted to summarize the situation in an incisive formula, one could say that English has clearly established itself as the 'first second language' of Europeans, but it is still far from being a 'second first language', to retake Habermas's phrase.

We also get a highly nuanced picture when we examine the spectrum of opinions among EU citizens on the issue of language diversity and its practical implications. The Eurobarometer special study quoted above also contains a range of information on this question. The table *Europeans and Foreign Languages* presents a summary of the positive responses to a series of questions concerning the problem of communication in the EU. An overview of the results brings some revealing tensions to light. The first striking fact is the high acceptance of a foreign language curriculum focused on the EU, with English clearly emerging as the preferred standard option. The hegemony of English in the opinions of Europeans is much more pronounced than the socio-linguistic basis actually enjoyed by English as a foreign language in Europe. But the openness to acquiring a foreign language, in general, and English, in particular, goes along with an almost equally strong impulse to defend one's own native language considering the next round of expansion. The view that the increase in the number of EU member states will lead to the introduction of a common language is not shared by a majority of respondents.[22]

Among EU citizens we find a complex spectrum of foreign language competence and of attitudes of relevance for language politics and policies. What approach do the European institutions adopt given the situation described? The EU does not have any powers which would allow it to exercise direct influence on language policy within the member states. Yet, the Union does exert a major indirect influence on the European language constellation. It begins with the fact that language regulations within European institutions function as a signal concerning the international status of languages. Linguists argue that the future of German as a foreign language, for example, depends crucially on whether the German government succeeds in making German a regular working language in institutions and governing bodies of the EU (Ammon 2003). Moreover, it is clear that the increasing intensity of transnational communication implied by the process of integration has consequences for language policies within the European states.

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21 Cf. the Eurobarometer Report 'Les Européens et les langues' (2001).

22 On this point, see also the study of the Institut für Deutsche Sprache, according to which only 8% of Germans support a single language for Europe. In addition, support for the idea of a common lingua franca coupled with the preservation of the individual languages does not go beyond 30,8%, while 41.1% are in favour of the complete preservation of language diversity. Cf. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 14, 2001 ('Wettbewerbsnachteil Muttersprache') (native language a competitive disadvantage).

The political architecture of European unification is based on the premise that a sharp division must be drawn between the sphere of economic integration and the sphere of cultural identity in the member states. On the prevailing view, the creation of a common market and a European 'government' need not and should not be taken as an excuse for political measures aimed at cultural homogeneity. However, in practice the distinction between culture and economy cannot always be clearly made (De Witte 1993: 164). In the first place, there are unavoidable spill-over effects from market integration into the cultural sphere. In addition, such effects lead to efforts on the part of member states and regions to immunise segments of markets from the pressures of transnational competition by appealing to the primacy of culture.

Table 1: Europeans and Foreign Languages

The questions put to all respondents in the 15 EU countries	Agree %	Disagree %	Don't know %
Everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one European Union language in addition to their mother tongue	**71.1**	20.2	8.7
Everyone in the European Union should be able to speak English	**69.4**	22.5	8.1
The enlargement of the Union to include new member countries means that we must protect our own languages more	**63.4**	22.6	14.0
The enlargement of the European Union to include new member countries means that we all have to start speaking a common language	38	**46.8**	15.2
In my region, people are good at speaking foreign languages	34.3	**39.0**	26.7
Everyone in the European Union should be able to speak two European Union languages in addition to their mother tongue	32.4	**53.4**	14.1
I prefer to watch foreign films with subtitles, rather than dubbed	29.8	**59.6**	10.6

Source: Direction Générale de l'Éducation et de la Culture de la Commission Européenne. Unité 'Centre pour le citoyen – Analyse de l'opinion publique', 2001: Les Européens et les langues.

Europe's single market rests on four pillars: the freedom of movement of capital, the freedom of movement of services, the freedom of movement of goods and the freedom of movement of persons. In realizing the four freedoms, language diversity generates transac-

tion costs that would not arise in a linguistically homogeneous environment. The essential goal of the four market freedoms is to facilitate the unhindered cross-border exercise of economic activities. Because language is a medium of such transactions, the market freedoms also implicitly include freedom in the use of language in transnational economic activities. The result is a potential conflict with language policy in multilingual member states in particular, and with the requirement to protect cultural diversity.

I would like to illustrate this point briefly with the example of the free movement of persons and the associated freedom to conduct business and freedom of employment for EU citizens. The principle of freedom of movement of labour in the internal market forbids a member state from restricting access to its labour market through regulations which disadvantage workers from another member state. According to Community law, the transnational freedom to conduct business and freedom of employment can indeed be restricted if a job calls for specific language knowledge. But as long as it cannot be proven that such knowledge is professionally necessary, the presumption is that a member state indirectly discriminates against foreign workers if it links the granting of a post to a particular linguistic competence. In a series of decisions since 1968, the European Court of Justice has taken the view that the principle of freedom of movement also holds for employment in the civil service sector, with the exception of those areas which play a key role in the exercise of a state's sovereign powers, such as the administration of justice and the police. Language criteria often feature in job announcements and recruitment for positions in the public sector in particular (De Witte 1991: 165-168). This raises the question of the implications of these criteria on the free movement of persons.

The question became the subject of a legal dispute in the *Groener* case on which the ECJ made a finding in 1989.[23] Anita Groener, a Dutch citizen, was employed on a part-time basis as an instructor in painting at the College of Marketing and Design in Dublin. In order to transform the job into a permanent full-time position, she had to take an examination in Irish – according to the Irish Constitution, the national language and the first official language of Ireland –, which she failed. The Irish Ministry of Education duly declined to appoint her to the post. Ms Groener contested this, basing her case primarily on the fact that instruction was conducted in English, as is the norm in Irish educational institutions such as her College; in her field, she alleged, knowledge of Irish is not actually required. Therefore, the refusal of the Ministry to grant her the position constituted indirect discrimination. The case was referred by the Irish side to the ECJ which found in favour of the Irish State. It granted that, in practice, knowledge of Irish was not absolutely necessary for instruction in Anita Groener's area of expertise. Nevertheless, it recognized the right of the Republic of Ireland to protect and promote the national language in public domains

23 My account of the case follows De Witte (1993: 159-160) and Usher (1998: 228-229).

beyond the immediate requirements of a context of instruction. The ECJ accorded greater weight to this right than to the principle of freedom of movement for employees. At the same time, it qualified its judgment with the remark that this did not entail a general presumption in favour of the priority of regulations governing language in the member states over the freedoms of the common market, and it reserved the right to decide individual cases on a contextual basis.

The potential for conflict between the functional imperatives of the internal market and European language diversity has not diminished since 1989. On the contrary, following the transition to the monetary union the ambivalences in the relation between the goals of market integration and respect for linguistic-cultural pluralism have become even more evident. Thus, it would be an illusion to think that Europe is on the brink of transforming itself into a quasi-Babylonian utopia. The indirect effects on language policy of EU activities in important areas of transnational social communication carry more weight than the institutional discourse on the language question. The dilemma of the EU is a dilemma that inevitably arises out of the coexistence of the expressive and the instrumental dimensions of language in multilingual contexts. The EU is forced to acknowledge that languages have an important identity-constituting moment. However, the technical game rules of market-driven integration often leave little room for the political articulation of expressive motifs. For example, when the Commission works on promoting the construction of transnational networks for research and development, it also contributes willy-nilly to solidifying the hegemony of English in the European research field. The framework programmes of the EU to promote research officially respect multilingualism; however, as a general rule, the participants assume that the operative language for the selection procedure is in fact English (Wright 2000: 218).

Which language for a European Civil Society?

Even if we assume that linguistic integration does not have to mean integration in just one language, the European Union is still far from being able to rely on the structures of a linguistically integrated civil society. In an effort to circumvent conflicts, European institutions have thus far avoided openly addressing the language question. But the strategy of avoidance has not ultimately reduced the political contentiousness of the language problem. From the perspective of a constitutionalisation, not to speak of a thoroughgoing democratization of the Union, the current situation can hardly be judged satisfactory. The political diffidence in confronting the language question has led to a series of normatively highly questionable results. Particularly problematic is the globally weak, and in many

ways inequitable, connection between European political institutions and a European civil society.

It is no exaggeration to regard citizens as the key element of a democratic order (Schmitter 2000: 5). By comparison with other regimes, only democracies can do full justice to the civil, political and social dimensions of the status of citizenship. This status is not exhausted by its legal components. The exercise of civil rights always has, in addition, an irreducible cognitive dimension. In the context of modern representative democracies, the idea of self-government implies, for example, mature and articulate citizens who are able to make competent assessments of the decisions of their representatives. Consequently, the citizenship status in practice always also reflects the results of deep political and cultural socialization processes in which educational institutions play a decisive role.[24] The education system fulfils the important task of transmitting to all members of society a minimum of cognitive competence which turns them into autonomous political subjects. In Western democracies this minimum involves as a general rule the acquisition of reading and writing skills and of 'general knowledge' in areas such as geography and history, which is also supposed to be a knowledge of one's 'own' identity. Where the cognitive dimensions of the citizenship status are neglected, the prospects of putting processes of public communication on a broad democratic foundation also suffer. It is precisely at this point that the political deficits of European integration have until now been most glaring; and here too the inability of the institutions to address the language question directly seems particularly revealing. As long as significant portions of the population in the member states lack the communicative means to participate in trans-European political discourses, the status of citizenship of the Union will necessarily remain on shaky ground.

What possibilities are there to meet the challenges of the politics of language in the EU in a constructive manner? Without doubt, when considering transnational communication at the level of the European citizenry, we must begin from different premises than in the institutional domain. For employees and officials in the administration, the ability and willingness to work in a polyglot environment are a taken-for-granted part of the required professional qualifications. Also in the case of political office-holders whose main area of activity lies in the European institutions, one may expect a minimum of competence in foreign languages, however acquired. By contrast, one cannot reasonably demand that the close to 50% of EU citizens who do not have any knowledge of foreign languages should quickly acquire such knowledge in order to become equally qualified members of a transnational polity based upon communication and participation. The priority for the present must be to develop a long-term strategy for dealing with the language question. Its primary

24 On the role of schools and political education in the formation of democratic civic communities, see Callan 1997 and March/Olsen 2000.

goals would be, on the one hand, to extend and reinforce the communicative foundations of the project of European integration and, on the other, to preserve the language diversity which for normative reasons cannot be placed in question. To fall back on a pair of concepts introduced by Fritz Scharpf (1994: 131), language policy programmes for Europe will have to be compatible with the communicative needs of a transnational community, while at the same time respecting the autonomy of the various language groups within this community. Beyond that, reactions to such programmes will crucially depend on the extent to which the details of the programme prove to be both pragmatic and just.

From the standpoint of fairness, the most elegant solution to the language problem might be to find a maximally neutral common vehicle of communication. The requirement of impartiality is in theory consistent with a number of alternatives. One possibility would be to agree on one of the minor, marginal European languages, one which does not even belong to one of the large language families.[25] A further option that is sometimes mooted is Latin, which functioned as a European lingua franca in learned circles over a long historical period. In a query to the Commission in 1974, the members of the European Parliament, Patijn and Van der Hek, did indeed propose re-establishing the traditional bridging function of Latin language by reviving it on a broader basis. The Commission responded that such an initiative was not within its sphere of competence (Coulmas 1991: 31). Aside from 'dead' languages, artificial languages such as Volapük and Esperanto are also occasionally the focus of speculation on how a unified European linguistic space could be created in a just manner. Supporters of Esperanto see the EU as an ideal context for realizing their utopia of linguistic internationalism (Phillipson 2003: 171-174), though their vision has not generated much enthusiasm within European institutions. Finally, the Finnish columnist Jukka Ukkola (1997) took the idea of an artificial language as the basis for a commentary in which he mockingly advocates the creation of a genuinely EU-based idiom. He describes how a European language union would follow the European monetary union. Its medium of communication, which he calls *Das Linguaque*, is proportionally composed of all official languages of the Union.[26] Such scurrilous broadsides do not amount to really serious objections to efforts to preserve linguistic and cultural neutrality in the EU. But it is hard to deny that, judged by criteria of realism and pragmatism, neither a time-honoured language like Latin nor more modern, artificial languages such as Esperanto represent viable candidates for a European lingua franca.

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25 Basque or Estonian come to mind as candidates which meet such criteria.

26 As a footnote, here is a small sample of *Das Linguaque*. According to Ukkola, the sentence 'My good fellow, could you please give me a packet of Holokki-Saima cigarettes (a traditional Finnish brand)?' would be translated as follows: '*Könnten you, bona monsieur, procurarmi huis een aket Hålåk-Saimaa, por favor?*'

Those who wish to accord priority to criteria of pragmatism and communicative efficiency, by contrast, will be inclined to advocate making English the official lingua franca of the European public space. The advantages of English are well known. The communication potential already possessed by the English language outstrips that of all other European languages. If the trends of the past decades continue, it will further consolidate this position in the EU (de Swaan 2001: 162-165). When young people from different European language groups come together these days, as a general rule English serves as virtually the 'natural' medium of dialogue. A comparison of job advertisements in several European countries reveals that English is by a long way the most frequently required language on the European labour market (Ammon 1994: 7). Admittedly, one should not be too hasty in overestimating the actual diffusion of English on the European continent. And we should not overlook the fact that other languages continue to fulfil lingua franca functions in Europe, though on a much lower level. But this in no way diminishes the inexorably increasing dominance of English.

The advantages of the English option from the point of view of efficiency derive primarily from the fact that European language policy would only have to give its blessing to facts already created by the European language market. Demand for English instruction is everywhere apparent. More and more parents want their children to begin learning English early at school and preschool. Adults who did not learn English, or enough English, at school attend courses to improve their knowledge of the language. In the new Eastern European democracies in particular, English is often seen as a direct link to Western affluence, technological progress and a world of consumption tinged with glamour (Phillipson/Skutnabb-Kangas 1994). That a good level of English is an advantage that opens up additional career opportunities is a widely-held view in the non-English speaking member states of the EU. In the final analysis, the high level of acceptance of English as a foreign language, as expressed in the Eurobarometer languages study, is not really surprising. Nor is the fact that EFL – *English as a Foreign Language* – has become an important source of economic revenue for Great Britain.

Giving institutional sanction to the de facto role of English would at any rate contribute to keeping the necessary investments for the regulation and enhancement of the transmission of foreign languages in the non-Anglophone member states relatively low. That English has established itself as the European lingua franca actually has less to do with European developments than with developments at the global level. The triumphal procession of *European English* is in reality just one aspect of the triumphal procession of *global English*. In fact, the position of English as a global language has reached dimensions without historical precedent.[27] English is the language of the global finance markets. In the

27 For an analysis of this phenomenon from the perspective of linguistics, see Crystal (1997).

domain of research it sets the proverbial tone. In the natural sciences it has an almost complete monopoly. Even in the humanities, other traditional European languages of learning, such as French, Russian and German, can often maintain only niche positions (Ammon 1994: 5-6). But outside of specialized domains of communication as well, (American) English has permeated the everyday lives of people all over the world. This is indeed less a consequence of the direct exercise of political power under the banner of the *Pax Americana* than an expression of the cultural hegemony of a lifestyle represented by Hollywood, Coca-Cola and McDonald's. However one views these developments, it cannot be disputed that no other language can match the advantages of English as a lingua franca that can be used in a multiplicity of communicative contexts inside and outside Europe.

The Political Option of a Converging Multilingualism

Why then, notwithstanding the situation just described, is *English only* not recommendable as a political strategy for dealing with the communication problems facing European civil society? I would like to present my answer in four steps which focus successively on different aspects of the language problem. In each case, I will pay particular attention to the political character of the problem.

First, granting English official status as the exclusive European lingua franca would not obviously be consistent with the requirements of justice. For the great majority of EU citizens, English is a foreign language. By contrast, in the member states Ireland and Great Britain it is an official language and also for most people their mother tongue. *European English* thereby reveals the same normative Achilles heel as does *global English* on a larger scale: its neutrality is contestable. English serves as the linguistic medium of comprehensive transnational communication communities. All those who are able to participate in the relevant communication processes, whether they are native speakers or not, benefit from the existence of such communities. However, the costs created by the emergence of an integrated English-language communicative space are not equally distributed. Knowledge of English as the requisite medium of communication is the birthright of a minority of participants; for the others, by contrast, it is the product of substantial educational efforts.[28] Recent psycholinguistic studies estimate the average time investment required by non-native speakers in the research domain to acquire a knowledge of English sufficient for participation in conferences and for publication at 10,000 learning hours (Ammon 2001). One might speculate on how much less effort would be required if the educational

28 For an interesting analysis of the indirect additional costs incurred by non-Anglophone states due to trends towards linguistic globalization, see Van Parijs (2000b).

goal were ‘merely’ to achieve a level of English sufficient for regular participation in transnational processes of political communication in the EU. But this is the decisive point: it may seem obvious to view good English knowledge as an important individual career advantage, or as an indispensable precondition for gaining access to circles of academically trained experts; but that does not make English a broadly-based legitimate foundation for a European political public sphere.

Second, opting for *European English* has obvious political connotations which cannot be overlooked. It would be absurd to regard the hegemony of English as the product of a global conspiracy at the level of language policy. Nevertheless, English undoubtedly owes its dominant position more to political and economic power relations than to its inherent characteristics. The rich, multifaceted character of the ‘European cultural heritage’ frequently invoked in official declarations would inevitably be severely compromised by a one-sided privileging of English at the linguistic level. For some, this *cultural* narrowing may seem an acceptable price to be paid for optimizing possibilities of communication in transnational space. But it is likely to have serious implications for the reproduction of the *political* identities which are constitutive of political communities as well. Moreover, that a narrowed cultural horizon as a general has consequences for the political willingness to perceive problems is shown – to take just one example – by the Oxford political scientist Larry Siedentop. In his book, *Democracy in Europe*, in which he commends the historical model of federalism in the USA as a suitable model for EU, he declares that English is the only adequate lingua franca for the project of integration (Siedentop 2000: 12, 132-4). The book contains extended discussions of how counterproductive the French approach to questions of political integration is and on how to assess the German attitude towards Brussels. However, non-British sources on the European political debates are scarcely mentioned.[29]

Third, precisely the successful diffusion of English may reduce its potential to serve as the standard medium of transnational public communication in the EU. This might seem paradoxical at first sight. However, the success story of English as a global lingua franca is in large part the result of millions of primarily instrumental calculations. People learn English to advance their careers, because they seek selective access to certain sources of information, or because they want to be able to use an efficient means of communication for travel or for maintaining a network of foreign contacts. Of course, there is nothing objectionable about such motivations. Nevertheless, the extent to which they provide a stable basis for the communicative integration of a political community remains questionable. In his sceptical remarks on the ideological binding force of cultural globalization, Michael Mann (2001: 65) has the following to say about the role of English: ‘English is advancing

29 I owe this reference to Paul Nemitz (personal communication, February 2001).

as the medium of public communication in the most modern sectors; but while many use the language to do business, they do not tell jokes or make love in it. Nor do their social movements mobilize in English, either peacefully or in battle'. Mann is clearly alluding to the difference between the instrumental and the expressive aspects of language when he underlines the limited functional scope of *global English*. Mann's point is that the 'naked' instrumentalism of English as a global medium of communication makes it difficult to foster the expressive bonds of linguistic communication.

Insofar as *European English* as a regional variant of *global English* becomes a generalized form of *Eurospeak*, it is indeed to be feared that the transnational component of identity will lack the solid foundation of a communicatively generated common political culture in the consciousness of EU citizens. With the instrumental narrowing of transnational structures of communication, an important moment of political identification would also be lost. But expressive motives would not disappear from politics simply because they were banned from the European stage. Instead, they would be channelled with [even] greater intensity into national and local public discourses, thereby further promoting tendencies towards the renationalization of Europe.

Fourth, a politics for which *English only* represents the royal road to the communicative integration of the European citizenry will have to face the objection that it does not take the potential for linguistic and cultural conflict seriously enough. The political consecration of English would imply, first of all, the banishing of the other European languages from key contexts of transnational communication. A tendency which has long been on the horizon in the economic and scientific realms would thereby be confirmed at the level of European politics. Clearly, such a step would have implications for the constellations of language policies in the members states themselves beyond its impact at the European level. It would be unrealistic to think that the role of *European English* as a medium of 'high' communication could be indefinitely confined to the transnational level. Instead, the likelihood is that English would become a genuine competitor for the national languages in key areas of administration and education. The dominance of *European English* in all key areas of elevated everyday communication would lead to formerly strongly institutionalized official languages finding themselves in a situation not unlike that of minority languages and *patois* in nation-states. They would be used in the family, among friends and acquaintances and in everyday local interactions, but hardly at all in universities, in prestigious professional fields or in high politics. It would be astounding if such a development were not to lead to conflicts as, among members of language groups who feel that they are not receiv-

ing due recognition, seeing their linguistic identity relegated to a second class status inspires feelings of resentment, which in turn fuel political mobilizations.[30]

If the objections outlined are correct, it remains to inquire what alternative strategies to *English only* are available as the basis for the communicative integration of a European citizenry. Harmonizing communicative efficiency with the postulate that cultural diversity should be politically recognized must seem a hopeless undertaking in light of the arguments presented thus far. However, the EU is well known for consistently coming up with ingenious compromises through protracted negotiations. From this perspective, an effective approach to the language question might be a 'piecemeal' one which opened it up to compromises. This requires, on the one hand, specifying a comprehensive framework for a solution and, on the other hand, seeking the most flexible answers possible to the language question within this framework.

Converging multilingualism may represent a viable framework for the EU's language policy. By 'converging multilingualism' I mean a model which, in creating shared contexts of communication, attempts to find a necessarily precarious balance between pragmatism and respect for diversity. In view of the continuing importance of political identities, which are intimately bound up with particular cultural and linguistic lifeworlds, the EU has at present no alternative to showing its citizens a high level of multilingual sensitivity. In the long run, a European language curriculum must be devised which is designed to break down barriers to understanding by creating overlapping communicative repertoires. Expectations concerning the anchoring or anchorability of multilingual competences in civil society will have to be less maximalist than in the institutional domain. Hence, it would be foolish to demonize English and its potential as a lingua franca in Europe. At the same time, however, it would be misleading to regard the European variant of *global English* as expressing the shared will of the community of peoples on questions of language policy.

Accordingly, the 'canonical' European repertoire of languages should include English without reservation, but it should also cover other languages wherever possible. To expect the EU to play Don Quixote tilting at the windmills of *global English* doesn't make much sense. On the other hand, the systematic promotion of English as a lingua franca by the European institutions would be like giving Microsoft a public subvention to develop software. Hence, the Union should set itself the goal of fostering a multilingualism which – while certainly being more selective than the LINGUA programme's approach based of reflecting the formal equality of all official languages – goes beyond English. The combination of languages to be promoted would ultimately depend on sociocultural contextual factors. Of particular importance, in my view, is the political component of the systematic

30 Fishman (1998) expresses scepticism concerning the prospects of long-term political acceptance of *global English* for analogous reasons.

attempt to promote multilingualism on a European scale. According to this, an essential motive for spreading foreign languages must be to foster the kind of intercultural ethos Wilhelm von Humboldt had in mind when he made a connection between learning a new language and 'gaining a new standpoint in how we view the world'. From this angle, foreign language instruction should be considered an important element of political education in Europe. The development of the EU into a polity constituted in such a way that it allows for innovative responses to identity conflicts calls for nothing more than the generalization of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence will also help the Union to win the respect at the global level which is garnered by those who have learnt to respect others.

Moreover, a converging multilingualism based on varying sets of two to three languages offers the prospect of alleviating the problems of linguistic status inequalities through a functional and regional diversification of European publics. Taking its orientation from the subsidiarity principle, the European political map could be divided into clusters of countries, regions and groups with linguistic-cultural affinities. For example, in the EU of the Fifteen one could have envisaged the emergence of a 'Latin', a 'Scandinavian', a 'Teutonic' and an 'Atlantic' network.[31] Following the same logics, the formation of a 'Slavonic' network might enhance processes of regional communication in the enlarged EU. Within the various clusters existing communicative proximity would in many cases makes it possible to take advantage of a passive bilingualism in which A and B mutually understand each other even though each employs a different language. As regards the pragmatic side, we should not underestimate the communicative efficiency of multilingual systems. Thus Colomer (1996: 134-136) uses probabilistic models to demonstrate that in a domain in which four languages are spoken and each individual is bilingual, the probability that two randomly chosen individuals with different mother tongues can communicate in a shared language is 78%. In a domain with ten languages the 'communicative probability' is 89%, provided that all individuals speak three languages (including their mother tongue). Such calculations show that inner-European communication potentials could be sharply increased through greater coordination of the foreign languages curriculum. The EU cannot square the language circle. However, defusing identity-conflicts based on language should prove to be a manageable task through a combination of multilingualism and recognition in the structuring of European politics.[32]

One point should be reemphasized to close this final section. The first and fundamental step towards clarifying the problem of communication in the multinational European

31 In the case of the countries of Northern Europe, such a network has long since acquired a stable institutional profile in the shape of the Nordic Council; cf. Berg 1988.

32 As Goodin (2004) shows, being aware of the importance of finding adequate ways of articulating diversity in the realm of political institutions does not necessarily require the 'mirror representation' of diversity.

community must be to thematize the language question openly at the political level. The hitherto prevailing strategy of EU institutions, in general, and of the Commission, in particular, of not putting the question on the agenda in an attempt to avoid conflicts means that the domain of political culture is in danger of succumbing to the logic of negative integration. Barriers to communication in transnational space are indeed being torn down; but because the overarching institutional regulatory framework remains diffuse, the market – in the present case, the language market – ultimately replaces politics. However, market mechanisms alone are unlikely to foster a collective European identity that is more than the sum of purely instrumental calculations. As Jürgen Habermas cogently observes, the '*systemic* dynamic' driving the Economic and Monetary Union 'by itself would not be enough to allow a form of mutual, transnational trust to emerge behind the back, so to speak, of the *cultural* substrate.'[33] This points to a problem to which European language policy must not shut its eyes. Ultimately, the political constitutionalisation of Europe as a multinational union must involve preventing precisely such 'behind the back' effects. In view of the obvious reluctance among EU leaders to confront the language issue seriously, it is hard to avoid the impression that the powers that be in Brussels expect that the necessary impulses for the construction of a communicatively integrated civil society will arise 'spontaneously' and ultimately elevate *European English* into a comfortable and politically unchallenged monopoly position. The argument developed here should make clear that the expectation of a more or less 'spontaneous', market-based solution to the language problem[34] rests on questionable assumptions. Language is a major European political issue and it should be treated as such. *Which* specific communication rules hold in European civil society may ultimately be less important than *how* these rules are implemented. Nothing would be more regrettable than to deny the citizens and peoples of Europe the opportunity to participate actively in politically shaping the transnational communicative space in which their concerns are supposed to find expression.

33 Habermas 2001b, p.102 (emphasis in original).

34 This expectation also occasionally shines through dimly in discussions of the language issue by social scientists (cf., for example, Laitin 1997 or de Swaan 2001).

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